TOGETHER for Children and Young People

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Multi-Agency Child Protection Team Safeguarding Consultation and Reflective Conversations



Cheshire East Council

1. PURPOSE

1.1 This guidance sets out how Lead Child Protection Practitioners (LCPPs) provide safeguarding consultation, professional challenge and reflective conversations within the Cheshire East Multi-Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT) model.

1.2 These functions support high-quality safeguarding practice by strengthening professional analysis, testing assumptions, exploring uncertainty and alternative explanations, and promoting proportionate, child-centred responses to risk and harm.

1.3 Consultation and reflective conversations should strengthen the confidence and capability of practitioners and managers to exercise their own professional responsibilities.

1.4 They do not:

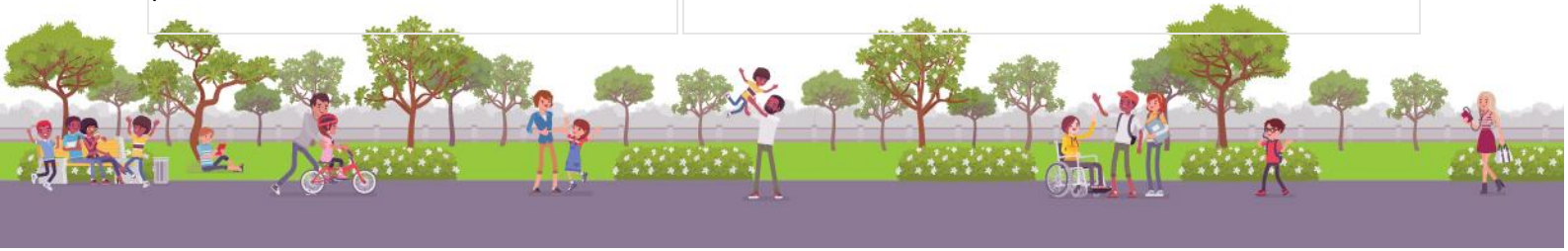
- Transfer case ownership.
- Replace operational management oversight.
- Replace supervision.
- Substitute for statutory safeguarding processes.
- Create additional approval arrangements.

1.5 This guidance does not introduce additional meetings, assessments, recording templates or referral processes.

2. DECISION-MAKING AND ACCOUNTABILITY SUMMARY

Function	Primary Accountability
Safeguarding consultation and specialist advice	LCPP
Case ownership, assessment and intervention	FHLP / Allocated Social Worker
Operational management and case supervision	Operational Team Manager
Statutory child protection threshold decisions	LCPP under agreed delegated authority
Strategy Discussion and Section 47 arrangements	As specified within MACPT Operational Procedures
Professional challenge and escalation	Relevant practitioners, managers and agencies acting within agreed procedures
Identification of recurring safeguarding practice themes	LCPP and MACPT Service Manager

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2.1 Key Principle

2.1.1 Consultation provides independent safeguarding expertise, professional challenge and scrutiny.

2.1.2 It does not transfer accountability for:

- Assessment.
- Intervention.
- Operational supervision.
- Case management.
- Delivery of agreed actions.

2.1.3 The practitioner and operational manager retaining case responsibility remain accountable for assessment, intervention and implementation. MACPT consultation or statutory decision-making does not transfer case ownership.

2.1.4 Where a statutory decision is required, the relevant formal MACPT process must be followed.

3. TYPES OF PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

3.1 Informal Professional Advice

3.1.2 Brief advice or clarification concerning safeguarding practice, thresholds, procedures or professional responsibilities.

3.1.3 Examples include:

- Clarifying the purpose of a Strategy Discussion.
- Discussing safeguarding procedures.
- Signposting to guidance.
- Clarifying safeguarding roles and responsibilities.
- Discussing the distinction between consultation and statutory decision-making.

3.1.4 Informal advice should not become a substitute for formal consideration of identifiable safeguarding concerns.

3.1.5 Where discussion moves into substantive analysis of risk, harm or protective arrangements for an identifiable child, it should be treated as safeguarding consultation.

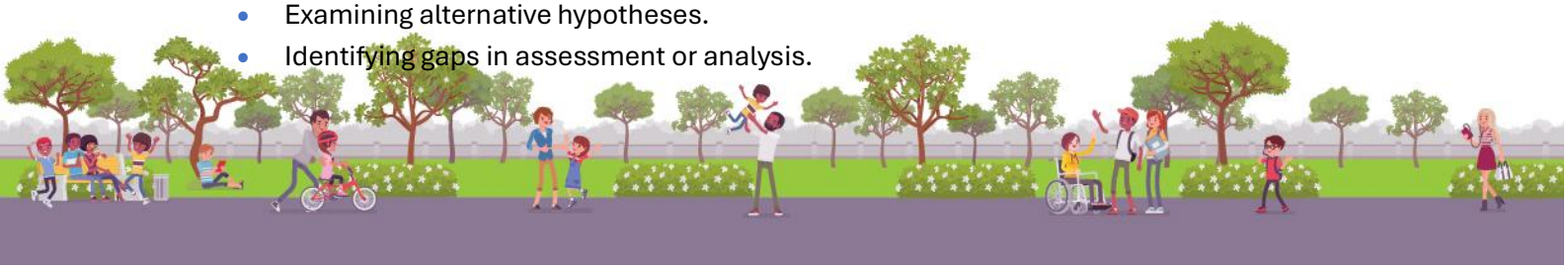
3.2 Safeguarding Consultation

3.2.1 A purposeful professional discussion concerning an identifiable safeguarding concern where specialist scrutiny or challenge is likely to strengthen analysis or inform the protective response.

3.2.2 Consultation may involve:

- Testing the sufficiency of safeguarding information.
- Exploring the child's lived experience.
- Considering cumulative harm and recurring concerns.
- Examining alternative hypotheses.
- Identifying gaps in assessment or analysis.

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- Considering protective factors and family networks.
- Exploring whether current intervention remains sufficient.
- Clarifying whether statutory safeguarding consideration is required.

3.2.3 Consultation should result in a clearer understanding of:

- The concern.
- The safeguarding analysis.
- The professional judgement reached.
- The actions required.

3.3 Reflective Professional Conversations

3.3.1 A structured but proportionate opportunity to explore complex safeguarding situations, professional uncertainty, practice dilemmas or the impact of safeguarding work on professional reasoning.

3.3.2 Reflective conversations may focus on:

- How professional assumptions have developed.
- The influence of previous experiences.
- The impact of organisational pressures.
- Differences in professional perspectives.
- The impact of uncertainty or complexity on decision-making.
- The balance between family strengths and safeguarding concerns.
- The influence of professional relationships on analysis.
- What needs to change in the safeguarding response.

3.3.3 Reflection should strengthen professional reasoning rather than simply provide reassurance.

3.3.4 It is not a replacement for:

- Formal supervision.
- Operational management.
- Performance management.
- Staff wellbeing arrangements.

3.4 Formal Statutory Decision-Making

3.4.1 Where concerns require:

- A child protection threshold decision.
- A Strategy Discussion.
- A Section 47 review.
- A statutory child protection outcome decision.
- Other delegated child protection decision-making.

3.4.2 The matter must progress through the agreed MACPT arrangements.

3.4.3 Such decisions should not be made or communicated solely through consultation or reflective conversations.

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4. WHEN CONSULTATION MAY BE APPROPRIATE

4.1 Safeguarding consultation may be particularly valuable where:

- There is uncertainty regarding the significance of emerging safeguarding concerns.
- A child has experienced repeated incidents or cumulative harm.
- Professional views differ regarding risk, harm or protection.
- Safeguarding intervention is not achieving meaningful change.
- Family engagement appears positive but evidence of improved safety is limited.
- Significant information gaps remain.
- Alternative explanations require testing.
- Practitioners require specialist challenge to strengthen analysis.
- There are concerns regarding the sustainability of protective arrangements.
- Collective professional scrutiny would strengthen safeguarding decision-making.

4.2 Consultation should remain proportionate to:

- The safeguarding question.
- The complexity of the concerns.
- The potential value of specialist scrutiny.

4.3 It should not become a routine requirement for all cases or an additional approval stage before operational decisions are made.

4.4 Consultation Threshold Principle

4.4.1 Where information considered during consultation gives reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, the concern must be progressed promptly through the agreed statutory safeguarding arrangements.

4.4.2 The LCPP should ensure that any required threshold consideration and statutory decision-making takes place through the appropriate MACPT process.

4.4.3 Consultation must not be used as a holding arrangement where immediate safeguarding action, statutory decision-making or child protection intervention is required.

5. ACCESSING SAFEGUARDING CONSULTATION

5.1 Consultation may be requested by:

- FHLPs and Allocated Social Workers.
- Operational Team Managers.
- Police representatives.
- Health representatives.
- Education representatives.
- Other relevant safeguarding professionals.

5.2 Requests should ordinarily identify:

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1. The safeguarding concern or professional question.
2. What is already known about the child's circumstances and lived experience.
3. What action has already been taken.
4. What remains uncertain or contested.
5. What the practitioner hopes consultation will clarify.

5.3 The LCPP should determine the appropriate response, taking account of:

- Urgency.
- Safeguarding risk.
- The nature of the request.
- Existing statutory responsibilities.

5.4 This may include:

- Brief advice.
- Safeguarding consultation.
- Reflective conversation.
- Rapid-Response Huddle.
- Daily Safeguarding Huddle discussion.
- Strategy Discussion.
- Alternative statutory safeguarding activity.

5.5 Existing MACPT communication arrangements should be used.

5.6 A separate consultation referral form is not required.

5.7 Urgent safeguarding concerns must be progressed immediately through the appropriate safeguarding arrangements and must not await consultation availability.

6. WHAT GOOD SAFEGUARDING CONSULTATION LOOKS LIKE

6.1 Effective consultation should move beyond discussion of events or professional activity and examine the child's lived experience and the adequacy of the protective response.

6.2 Understanding the Concern

6.2.1 The LCPP should support the practitioner to consider:

- What are we worried about?
- What is the child experiencing?
- What is the nature and potential impact of harm?
- What patterns or cumulative concerns are emerging?
- What information is missing?

6.3 Testing Analysis

6.3.1 Consultation should distinguish between:



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- Established facts.
- The child's account.
- The family's account.
- Professional observations.
- Analysis and interpretation.
- Assumptions.
- Uncertainty.
- Alternative explanations.

6.3.2 Professional challenge should be constructive, evidence-informed and focused on improving safeguarding decision-making.

7. UNDERSTANDING PROTECTION

7.1 Consultation should consider:

- What strengths exist within the family and wider network?
- Which adults and relationships provide reliable protection?
- How do we know these protective arrangements are effective?
- What evidence demonstrates meaningful change?
- What could undermine existing safeguarding arrangements?
- Could wider family-network involvement strengthen safety or sustainable change?

7.2 Where appropriate, family-network involvement should be considered as a potential source of protection and longer-term support.

7.3 Determining Next Steps

7.3.1 Consultation should conclude with clarity regarding:

- The safeguarding analysis.
- Any further information required.
- Immediate protective action.
- Whether statutory safeguarding consideration is required.
- Agreed actions.
- Responsible practitioners.
- Any need for further scrutiny or escalation.

7.3.2 The LCPP should not assume responsibility for implementing actions that remain within the practitioner's or operational team's remit.

7.4 Consultation Outcomes

7.4.1 Consultation will typically result in one or more of the following:

- No additional safeguarding action identified following consideration of the available information.
- Additional assessment or information gathering.
- Strengthened safeguarding planning.

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- Further consultation or reflective discussion.
- Escalation through management arrangements.
- Referral to Daily Safeguarding Huddle.
- Referral to Rapid-Response Huddle.
- Strategy Discussion.
- Alternative statutory safeguarding activity.

8. REFLECTIVE CONVERSATIONS

8.1 Reflective conversations provide an opportunity to examine the professional thinking, relationships and organisational factors influencing safeguarding practice.

8.2 They should be purposeful and connected to an identifiable safeguarding or practice question.

8.3 Core Reflective Questions

- What assumptions are influencing our understanding?
- What might we be overlooking?
- How are professional relationships affecting our interpretation?
- Are we giving sufficient weight to the child's lived experience?
- What evidence supports or challenges our current approach?
- Are we responding to the level of risk or becoming accustomed to it?
- What would a different professional perspective contribute?
- What needs to change as a result of this reflection?

8.4 Professional Boundaries

8.4.1 Reflective conversations should not:

- Replace operational supervision.
- Transfer responsibility for safeguarding decisions.
- Become routine reviews of all open cases.
- Duplicate existing multi-agency forums.
- Delay safeguarding intervention.
- Operate as an informal route to statutory authorisation.

8.4.2 Where reflection identifies significant safeguarding concerns, the discussion must move promptly into the appropriate statutory or safeguarding arrangements.

9. RELATIONSHIP WITH MULTI-AGENCY HUDDLES AND SECTION 47 REVIEWS

9.1 Consultation, reflective conversations, huddles and statutory review arrangements have distinct but complementary purposes.

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Arrangement	Primary Purpose
Safeguarding Consultation	Specialist analysis and professional challenge regarding a safeguarding concern
Reflective Conversation	Examination of professional reasoning, uncertainty and practice dilemmas
Rapid-Response Huddle	Immediate multi-agency coordination in urgent safeguarding situations
Daily Safeguarding Huddle	Selective multi-agency scrutiny where collective intelligence or challenge may alter the protective response
Section 47 Review	Scrutiny of enquiry progress, evidence, risk, protection and statutory outcomes
Strategy Discussion	Formal multi-agency consideration of safeguarding concerns and required statutory response

9.2 A consultation may identify the need for:

- A Daily Safeguarding Huddle.
- A Rapid-Response Huddle.
- A Strategy Discussion.
- A Section 47 Review.
- Another statutory safeguarding process.

9.3 Equally, issues identified through statutory processes may indicate a need for additional consultation or reflection.

9.4 Relationship to Multi-Agency Huddles

9.4.1 Referral to a Multi-Agency Huddle should be based on the specific purpose and criteria set out in the Multi-Agency Huddle Practice Guidance.

9.4.2 A huddle should not be convened solely because a consultation has taken place or because a case is complex.

9.4.3 The purpose of consultation is to support safeguarding analysis, decision-making and professional challenge. Where multi-agency scrutiny, intelligence sharing or collective professional judgement is required, and the agreed huddle criteria are met, referral to the appropriate huddle arrangement may be indicated.

9.4.4 The appropriate process should always be determined by the safeguarding purpose, level of risk and statutory responsibilities involved.

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10. PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGE AND ESCALATION

10.1 Professional challenge is an essential element of safeguarding consultation and reflective practice.

10.2 Where practitioners disagree regarding:

- Risk.
- Harm.
- Protective arrangements.
- Thresholds.
- Proposed intervention.

10.3 The LCPP should support constructive examination of the available evidence and competing professional perspectives.

10.4 Disagreement should not be resolved through consensus alone where significant safeguarding concerns remain.

10.5 Where consultation identifies:

- Immediate or escalating risk.
- Insufficient safeguarding arrangements.
- Significant unresolved disagreement.
- Potential statutory threshold concerns.
- Repeated failure to progress safeguarding actions.

10.6 The appropriate safeguarding, management or partnership escalation arrangements should be followed.

10.7 Escalation should remain proportionate to the level of concern and urgency.

Protective action must never be delayed whilst disagreement is being resolved.

11. RECORDING AND COMMUNICATION

11.1 Recording should remain proportionate to the significance and nature of the consultation.

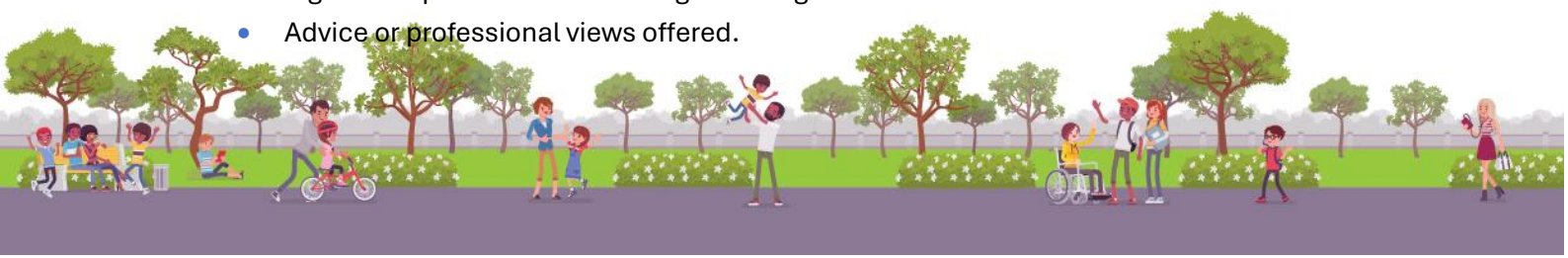
11.2 Brief advice that does not involve identifiable child-specific safeguarding analysis does not ordinarily require a separate child-level record.

11.3 Where consultation materially informs safeguarding analysis, risk assessment, protection planning or decision-making, relevant information should be recorded through existing arrangements.

11.4 Recording should establish, where relevant:

- The safeguarding question considered.
- Information and analysis discussed.
- Significant professional challenge or disagreement.
- Advice or professional views offered.

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- Decisions requiring statutory consideration.
- Agreed actions, owners and timescales.
- Escalation or follow-up activity required.

11.5 Recording Accountability

11.5.1 The practitioner or agency requesting consultation remains responsible for recording relevant advice, analysis, decisions and actions within their own recording arrangements, in accordance with their professional and organisational responsibilities.

11.5.2 Where consultation concerns an identifiable child known to Children's Services, the LCPP should ensure that significant safeguarding advice, professional challenge, decisions requiring statutory consideration and agreed actions are appropriately evidenced within existing MACPT or Children's Services recording arrangements.

11.5.3 Where the child is not currently known to Children's Services, the LCPP should ensure that any information requiring referral, statutory consideration or safeguarding action is progressed and recorded through the appropriate existing pathway.

11.5.4 No additional consultation template or parallel recording system is required.

12. IDENTIFYING WIDER PRACTICE LEARNING

12.1 Consultation and reflective conversations may identify recurring themes affecting safeguarding quality or consistency.

12.2 Examples include:

- Repeated uncertainty regarding thresholds.
- Gaps in multi-agency information-sharing.
- Patterns of professional disagreement.
- Difficulties evidencing meaningful change.
- Recurring weaknesses in safeguarding analysis.
- Unclear professional roles or interfaces.

12.3 Where such themes emerge, the LCPP should bring them to the attention of the MACPT Service Manager for consideration through existing service and partnership learning arrangements.

12.4 Recurring themes identified through consultation and reflective conversations should inform:

- Supervision.
- Workforce development.
- Quality assurance activity.
- Service improvement arrangements.
- Partnership learning and development.

12.5 No separate reporting process is required.

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13. WHAT GOOD PRACTICE LOOKS LIKE

13.1 Effective safeguarding consultation and reflective conversations contribute to:

- Stronger professional analysis.
- Greater confidence in recognising and responding to harm.
- Earlier identification of escalating safeguarding concerns.
- More effective professional challenge.
- Clearer accountability and decision-making.
- Better use of family strengths and protective networks.
- More proportionate safeguarding intervention.
- More timely safeguarding responses.
- Improved outcomes for children.

13.2 The effectiveness of consultation should not be measured by the number of conversations undertaken.

13.3 The central test is whether consultation or reflection strengthens professional understanding, improves the safeguarding response and contributes to greater safety for children.

Final Practice Questions

Before concluding a safeguarding consultation or reflective conversation, practitioners should be able to answer:

1. What safeguarding or practice question brought us together?
2. What have we learned about the child's lived experience?
3. What assumptions or uncertainties have been challenged?
4. Has our understanding of harm, risk or protection changed?
5. What action, if any, is now required?
6. Who is responsible for that action?
7. Does anything require statutory consideration or escalation?
8. How will we know whether the response has improved the child's safety?

Final Principle

The guiding principle is purposeful consultation, constructive challenge and reflective professional reasoning that strengthens safeguarding practice without duplicating statutory or operational responsibilities.

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